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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this preliminary study of journalism in Florida junior high schools is to determine whether activities in this field are numerous enough to justify a thorough study. A questionnaire covering 78 items was distributed and answers received from 55 junior high schools. While the data in the questionnaire are easy to interpret, many undecided answers were given to fact questions. A total of 19 tables gives a breakdown of these answers. One conclusion reached from this survey is that junior high school journalism teachers need better guidance than they are now receiving from county and state agencies. (CK)

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Journalism in Florida Junior High Schools

A Brief Study by Dr. Laurence R. Campbell

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1. Introduction

Journalism has an indeterminate status in American junior high schools. Are student publications desirable in junior high schools? Are journalism courses desirable in junior high schools? These questions remain unanswered so far as significant research is concerned.

Contrast this situation with that of journalism in senior high schools. More than a hundred master's theses have been written about curricular and co-curricular activities in journalism in senior high schools. Several doctoral dissertations also have dealt with this field.

National, regional, and state school press associations center their attention on senior high schools. Their conferences, critical services, and other activities are designed to serve senior high schools. Junior high schools tag along--sometimes tolerated as a poor relation.

Classroom materials have been available for senior high schools for many years. Textbooks, workbooks, courses of study, and supplementary materials are available for them. Where is there a widely known textbook or workbook designed especially for junior high school journalists?

Yet junior high schools persist in sponsoring journalism activities. Many produce newspapers, yearbooks, and magazines. Some offer journalism courses with credit. Perhaps the time has come to examine this field critically to determine clearly the role of journalism in junior high schools.

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2. Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this preliminary study of journalism in Florida junior high schools is to determine whether activities in this field are numerous enough to justify a thorough study. Thus, the intent is to explore the field as a means of considering more thorough study.

3. Method

First, a questionnaire covering 78 items was designed so that it could be used with an IBM answer sheet. Second, it was mailed to 214 junior high schools in 35 counties in the state of Florida. Third, the answers were tabulated by the Department of Educational Research and Testing at Florida State University. Fourth, the data are presented here.

4. Response

Questionnaires were received from 55 junior high schools in 16 counties of Florida. Reasons for the low return may be:

a) The questionnaires were mailed shortly before the opening of school.

b) No stamped self-addressed envelope was included.

c) Many of the schools may have had no journalism activities.

d) Some teachers may not have understood how to use the answer sheet.

e) Many Florida teachers were preoccupied with the failure of the governor and legislature to prevent a crisis in the public schools.

5. Summary

While the data in general are easy to interpret, it is somewhat puzzling to note the frequency of the "don't know" or "undecided" answers which many gave to fact questions. In some instances no answer at all was given to questions involving facts. As a consequence, there appear to be occasional inconsistencies in the data.

Consider these examples:

a) In Table 1 there were 10 teachers who checked the "don't know" or "undecided" answer to the question of whether their junior high school had a magazine or anthology.

b) In Table 5 there were 10 to 12 teachers who didn't answer questions which involved ascertainable facts.

c) In Table 1 there were only 8 magazines or anthologies reported, but in Table 2 there were 14 teachers who reported that they were assigned to sponsor this publication. Perhaps the "don't know" answer meant that

they weren't sure whether the publication would become a reality.

Consider these observations:

a) Of the 55 junior high schools, 51 reported that they published a duplicated, offset, or letterpress newspaper; 34, a yearbook; 8, an anthology, or magazine. And 29 offered a journalism course with credit. (See Table 1.)

b) English teachers were assigned to be adviser of 49 of the 51 newspapers, 23 of the 34 yearbooks, and 14 of the 8 magazines! And 34 were assigned to the 29 journalism classes! (See Table 2.)

c) Why aren't some of these activities sponsored in some schools? Among the reasons were lack of interest on the part of the principal, 8; English teachers, 7; students, 12. (See Table 3.)

d) While 48 teachers reported that they had English certificates, only 19 reported that they had journalism certificates. The figure 48 is given in this table but the figure 49 was given in the preceding table. Since an English teacher in Florida can get a journalism certificate by taking only 6 semester hours in journalism, the minimum qualification is not difficult to meet. Yet almost two-thirds have not met this qualification. (See Table 4.)

e) Only a few schools--five--report a county course of study in junior high school journalism. Apparently 19 schools use the state-adopted senior high school textbook in journalism. Many of them report "numerous current" books on journalism in their school libraries. Not even one-third use an overhead projector once a week. (See Table 5.)

f) Effective supervision is available only in four instances. Only one county has a course of study. Hence, the five schools reporting such a course of study in the previous table probably were in the same county. (See Table 6.)

g) Teachers apparently are satisfied with the cooperation they receive from students and faculty, but not that of merchants. (See Table 7.)

h) Relatively few junior high schools affiliate with the state or national school press associations. (See Table 8.)

i) Relatively few teachers are satisfied with the cooperation they receive from Florida Scholastic Press Association, the state department of education, Florida schools of journalism, Florida schools of education, or organizations of English teachers. (See Table 9.)

j) Few schools circulate the newspaper to students without charge, but approximately two-thirds give free copies to faculty. About four out of five promote circulation by the sale of separate copies. Approximately one-half of them rely on other sources of revenue or advertising to obtain funds. (See Tables 10, 11, 12.)

k) One teacher in six is satisfied with classroom facilities for journalism activities. Few publications have been submitted to national or other critical services. Purchasing power of students is more likely to be above average than below. (See Tables 13, 14, 15.)

l) Emphasis in journalism courses is more likely to be on journalistic techniques than on the consumer of mass media, freedom of the press, careers in journalism, leaders in journalism, or foreign journalism. (See Table 16.)

m) Despite the fact that only 19 teachers have journalism certificates, there is limited interest in improvement. Very few are willing to meet minimum requirements by going to summer session. (See Tables 17, 18.)

n) The inducements to become journalism teachers are almost nonexistent, although about one-third get an addition in salary for work in journalism and nearly one in five has a modification of load. (See Table 19.)

6. Conclusion

The data presented herein do not justify sweeping generalizations. At the same time it seems evident that junior high school journalism teachers are adrift. Most of them receive no guidance from the county office or state department of education, from schools of education or schools of journalism, from school press associations or organizations of English teachers. Yet many of them perform adequately, sometimes producing student publications superior to some of those published in some senior high

schools. It is obvious that they need better guidance than they are now receiving, yet there seems to be no immediate prospect that those agencies to which they properly might turn for help will show any more interest in them than they have in the past.

7. Appendix

Activity	Yes	No	Don't know or Undecided	No Answer
Table 1. Scope of journalism activities in junior high schools in Florida				
Newspaper - letterpress	7	46	1	1
Newspaper - offset	14	40	1	
Newspaper - duplicated	30	22	1	2
Yearbook	34	20		1
Anthology or magazine	8	36	10	1
Journalism course with credit	29	25	1	
Table 2. Extent to which English teachers are assigned duties in supervision of journalism activities				
Newspaper adviser	49	6		
Yearbook adviser	23	26	3	3
Magazine or anthology adviser	14	32	5	4
Journalism course teacher	30	20	4	1
Table 3. Reasons why some of the foregoing journalism activities are not sponsored. Lack of interest on part of:				
Students	12	20	16	7
Principal	8	25	15	7
English department	7	24	17	7
Table 4. Secondary school teaching certificates held by newspaper adviser				
English	48	6		1
Journalism	19	31	3	2

Activity	Yes	No	Don't Know or Undecided	No Answer
Table 5. Practices in journalism class. It uses:				
County course of study in journalism	5	35	3	12
State-adopted textbook for junior high school journalism	19	22	4	10
Numerous current books on journalism in the school library	26	15	4	10
Overhead projector at least once a week to visualize lessons	8	30	5	12
Table 6. County school system's service to journalism activities				
Provides a supervisor with a teaching certificate and significant experience as publication adviser to help journalism teachers	4	34	11	6
Provides a course of study in journalism	1	41	9	4
Table 7. Extent to which student publications received substantial support				
From principals	48	2	3	2
From students	48	3	3	1
From coaches	37	12	4	2
From counselors	39	7	6	3
From faculty in general	42	8	3	2
From English department	46	5	2	2
From merchants	10	31	9	5
Table 8. Extent to which student newspapers are affiliated with scholastic press association				
Florida Scholastic	11	34	4	6
National Scholastic	3	42	4	6
Columbia Scholastic	6	39	4	6

Activity	Yes	No	Don't Know or Undecided	No Answer
Table 9. Agencies from which junior high schools receive satisfactory cooperation				
Florida Scholastic Press Assn.	12	16	18	9
State department of education	10	12	23	10
Schools of journalism in Fla.	8	15	23	9
Schools of education in Fla.	9	14	23	9
Organizations of English teachers	18	11	18	8
Table 10. Extent to which newspaper is circulated free				
To students	6	43		6
To faculty	35	16		4
Table 11. Method by which students pay for newspaper				
Through fees	3	44	1	7
Activity cards	1	47	1	6
Subscriptions	8	40	1	6
Sale of individual copies	40	10	1	4
Table 12. Sources from which newspaper receives funds other than circulation				
Advertising	10	39		6
Subsidy	8	41		6
Other sources	26	22	1	6
Table 13. Number of newspapers with laboratory equipped satisfactorily with tables, files, bulletin boards, and necessary facilities				
Number	8	40	2	5
Table 14. Extent to which newspapers have won recognition in critical services				
National	6	40	2	7
Other	4	42	3	6
Table 15. Purchasing power of junior high school students				
About average	32	19		4
Below average	8	40		7
Above average	16	33		6

Activity	Yes	No	Don't Know or Undecided	No Answer
Table 16. Units to which journalism class gives one week or more of attention				
Consumer of mass media	21	20	1	13
Getting the news	34	9	1	11
Writing the news	34	9	1	11
Reading the news	30	13	1	11
Headlines and makeup	32	10	2	11
Editorials, columns, reviews	31	11	2	11
Features and articles	34	9	1	11
Creative writing	26	16	2	11
Advertising	18	24	2	11
Freedom of the press	17	22	4	12
Careers in mass media	13	26	4	12
Leaders in journalism	12	27	3	13
Foreign journalism	4	36	3	12
Table 17. Courses which journalism teachers would like to take				
Reporting for teachers	4	35	4	12
Mass media in modern society	13	26	4	12
History of mass media	9	31	3	12
Teaching journalism	23	17	3	12
Supervising newspapers	25	16	3	11
Supervising yearbooks	13	28	3	11
Photography	15	23	5	12
Advertising	11	28	4	12
Public relations	16	24	3	12
Table 18. Method teacher prefers in taking foregoing courses				
Extension courses	23	17	3	12
Summer session	9	27	6	13
Summer workshop for junior high school teachers	20	18	5	12
Table 19. Inducements given junior high school journalism teachers				
Addition to salary for supervising newspaper	18	28	1	8
Modification in teaching load to give her time for supervising newspaper	10	36	1	8